

Varicose vein surgery - Your questions answered (page 1 of 3)



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The evidence used in the preparation of this leaflet is available on request. Please email: patient.information@salisbury.nhs.uk if you would like a reference list.

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This leaflet should be read along with advice given by your doctor or nurse.

Why do I need this operation?

To reduce the risk of ulcers on your leg and to relieve the symptoms you are experiencing.

What are the possible risks and complications?

As with any operation there is a risk from the anaesthetic, but this is very small.

- It is possible the groin wound may become infected, and you will have to take some antibiotics. This happens in about 2% (or 2 in 100) operations.
- There is a small risk of nerve damage and an area of numbness may result. This may be temporary or permanent.
- The varicose vein will come back within 5 years in around 5% (or 5 in 100) patients
- Around 1% (or 1 in 100) patients have a DVT (deep vein thrombosis) after this operation.

Are there any special tests or investigations needed?

The problem vein may already have been identified, but in certain cases a duplex scan will be necessary.

How long will I be in hospital for this operation?

If your general fitness allows it, you will be booked in as a day case in the Day Surgery Unit. Sometimes medical problems require an overnight stay which, will be arranged for you.

What do I do before the operation?

- If you smoke, you are strongly advised to stop before you have a general anaesthetic. You are at greater risk of having a chest infection or a DVT if you continue to smoke. Stopping smoking is the single most effective way to improve your health. The NHS quitline no is: 0800 022 4 332.
- If you are going to have a cut in the groin the area will need to

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be shaved (there is no need to take off all the pubic hair). You may wish to do this at home. Sometimes the whole leg needs to be shaved if it is hairy.

- On the day of your operation you are not allowed to eat anything 6 hours before your appointment time, but you can drink clear fluids up to 2 hours beforehand.
- If you normally take medication it is important that you bring them with you in their original containers.

What can I expect on arriving at hospital?

Report to the Reception Desk. The nurses, who will look after you, will meet you soon after. The anaesthetist and the surgeon will also see you before the operation and answer any questions you may have. You will be asked to sign a consent form and the surgeon will mark the veins to be removed.

What happens during the operation?

You will be given a general anaesthetic for this operation. The operation usually takes about one hour for each leg. In most cases a cut is made in the groin at the top (origin) of the main varicose vein, which is then tied off just where it joins the deep vein in the groin. The long main vein is then stripped by gently passing a fine wire down the length of it to just above or below the knee. This helps prevent varicose veins forming again. The groin cut is closed with stitches just under the skin. If the vein causing you trouble originates from the knee, the main cut is made just behind the knee. The bulging veins, marked before the operation are then removed through tiny cuts, which are closed with small pieces of tape.

What sort of bandages will I have?

You will have a dressing on top of the stitches - this can be removed after 2 - 3 days. Where veins have been removed you will have strips of adhesive tape which will need to be left in place for about 10 days. There will be some padding over the dressings. This may be removed after 2 days and if all the wounds are dry you may shower. On top you will have an elastic stocking, which you will be advised to wear for the first two weeks.

Will there be some bleeding?

During the operation there is always some bleeding and it is not always possible to wash all the traces of blood and antiseptic solution off the leg. This will always come off when you have a bath or shower. It is also common to have some oozing during the first 24 - 48 hours. This is likely to be a small amount and will usually stop on its own. If necessary use a pad of tissues to press on the wound for about 10 minutes. If bleeding continues after doing this twice, phone your GP or come into the Accident and Emergency Department. Some bruising on the leg is to be expected.

Areas of bruising, lumpiness and swelling in surgical wounds and where veins have been stripped are extremely common. These will slowly resolve without treatment although it may well be 2 to 3 months before the leg returns fully to normal and the final result of the operation can be assessed.

There may be some oozing of clear fluid from the groin wound. While this is clear fluid only you can ignore it.

If the fluid becomes yellow or smelly, or if the wound becomes more red, swollen or painful, please contact your own doctor (GP) without delay as you may have a wound infection.

After the operation

- If you have had your operation as a day case, you will be allowed to go home the same day.
- Remember you will not be able to drive yourself home. You should arrange for a relative or friend to collect you as soon as the nurses are happy for you to leave.

What do I do when I get home?

You can get back to your normal activities right away. Keep as active as possible but try to avoid standing, or sitting with your feet on the floor for extended periods of time, for the first couple of weeks. When you are not walking try to keep your legs up on a couch or on your bed. You need to keep wearing the elastic stocking for the first 2 weeks, when you are up and about, but you can remove it when you go to bed at night. In some cases patients are advised to continue to wear compression hosiery after the operation to prevent leg ulceration.

After 2 or 3 days, the dressings can be removed at home. Slight oozing of blood from stab wounds on the leg is usual and can lead to the dressing sticking. This is easily overcome by first removing any covering stocking or 'Tubigrip' and then soaking the entire leg and bandages in a simple warm bath for 10 to 15 minutes, after which the dressing can be removed without difficulty. Please replace the stocking after bathing and showering during the first two weeks.

When can I drive a car?

You will be able to drive again as soon as you are confident that you can make an emergency stop without pain. (Usually after about 1 week). Check with your insurance company.

When can I return to work?

You can return to work and sporting activities as soon as you feel well enough. If your job involves prolonged standing or driving you should take a couple of weeks off.

Will my leg be painful after the operation?

You may experience some discomfort but you will be given some painkillers to take for that. You should only need these for a couple of days.